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APRIL - JUNE 2019

TEGA SPORTS

vicky benavente goes fishing

where is xenavee pangelinan now?

tania tan: reluctant runner to winner

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mistakes women make with exercise and diet

triathlon+ janetking

2019 SPORTS CALENDAR

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APRIL

KONQER Apocalypse Tour: Micronesia's obstacle course circuit will have its stop on Saipan on April 27 with the kick-off event dubbed as "Survive."

2nd Annual CNMI Disability Sports Festival: This event caters to players with disabilities and has separate competitions for Saipan, Rota, and Tinian.

CCOPSA Middle School Basketball League: The Commonwealth Coalition of Private Schools Association's competition for sixth to eighth graders.

MAY

2019 Public School System/McDonald's All Schools Track and Field Championships: CNMI's elementary, middle, and high schools students compete in running, jumping, and throwing events.

Northern Marianas Junior Championships: This tennis tournament brings together junior players from across the globe, as they battle for Juniors ITF world ranking points.

HANMI Charity Golf Classic: The Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands hosts the annual golf tournament to raise funds for its community projects.

JUNE

North Pacific Regional Qualifying Tournament: Saipan will host the qualifier, as junior tennis players from the CNMI, Guam, Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia vie for slots on the North Pacific Team that will compete in the Pacific Oceania Junior Championships in Fiji.

Public School System Boys Indoor Volleyball Tournament: High school teams exchange spikes and serves in this double-elimination tournament.

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In the wake of the global observance of International Women's Month last March, we at TAGA *Sports* are still having a major hangover and are featuring in this edition some stories that highlight strong women and an admonition from Dre Delos Santos on four mistakes that women make when it comes to diet and exercise. ***See story on Page 6***

One of the CNMI's superhero in the early '90s, Xenavee Pangelinan Torwal, was truly a wunderkind in the swimming pool. Breaking and setting records left and right, she started her amazing stint in the pool at just 11 years old and smashed so many records that she eventually made it to the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame last February. ***See story on Page 10***

Another woman making a name for herself is CNMI Labor Secretary Vicky Benavente. From Pacific Islands Club official, to Marianas Visitors Authority honcho, and now Labor chief, Benavente also enjoys piscatorial pursuits during weekends, when she puts on a wide-brimmed hat, slathers on lots of sunblock, and joins her husband, former lieutenant governor Diego Benavente, for a day of troll fishing. And goodbye to special treatment when she's on the boat. ***See story on Page 16***

In the field of sports, lawyer and former Miss CNMI Universe Janet King is making waves in triathlon, with her recent participation in the 30th edition of the Tagaman last March 30, 2019. King is a Tagaman regular and juggles her time doing races and attending trials, while being a loving mom to her two kids.

A young one who is carving her own niche in the field of competitive running is Tania Tan, a perennial contender in local running competitions in the last two years. At just 17 years old, she has an array of choices ahead of her and it is to be hoped that one of those choices would be running. ***See story on Page 24***

For questions, criticisms, letters, and suggestions, email them to editor@saipantribune.com.

Senseramente,
JAYVEE VALLEJERA
Managing Editor

COVER ART

Janet King's 4-year-old son, Samuel, climbs atop his mother's shoulders at Micro Beach as King prepares for the Tagaman Triathlon. King also has a daughter, Kate, who is 8

Photography by
Kristin Berry with Lauren Benson Photography

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WRITER'S BLOC

BEA CABRERA

In the wake of the celebration of International Women's Month, Bea chose to highlight in this edition one of the CNMI's own, Labor Secretary Vicky Benavente, and we find out what Benavente does during weekends, when she is not being "Madame Secretary." To reach Cabrera, email beecabbie@gmail.com.

DRE DELOS SANTOS

Dre, a Mount Carmel School alumnus, earned his bachelor's degree in Kinesiology at the University of Hawaii. Alongside his effort to help people improve their lives through strength training, his articles have appeared on websites such as STACK and Testosterone Nation. He's also been featured on Insider, Weight Watchers, and other media outlets.

MAMI IKEDA

Mami considers herself a daughter of the Koto Restaurant that was ran by her late parents in Susupe back in the late '70s to early '80s. A member of disaster relief team C.O.R.E. and the Commonwealth Racing Federation, and an advocate for the Commonwealth Cancer Association, Mami loves being a crazy cat mom and herb gardening. To reach her, email mami96950@gmail.com.

ROSELYN MONROYO

Roselyn had never reported on triathlon before so when she came here and covered Tagaman Triathlon for the first time, she got so excited taking pictures that she foolishly got into the waters off Pacific Islands Club and was nearly knocked down by the rush of swimmers.

JON PEREZ

Fried banana, crackers, instant noodles, and cheap karinderya (roadside food stalls) meals used to be the staple food of Jon while attending the University of the East-Manila—not the healthiest of meals, yes, but de rigueur when you're on a student's allowance.

MARK RABAGO

Mark first wrote about Xenavee Pangelinan as she was fresh from her Most Outstanding Female Athlete stint in the 2002 Micronesian Games. She was also one of the first choices for the "Where Are They Now?" section of TAGA Sports. After about nine years of tracking her down, Mark finally found out.

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You may only know cloud ear or black mushrooms from everyone's favorite Korean dish, japchae, but did you know that it's packed with healthy nutrients? It's loaded with insoluble dietary fiber that clears your constipation, potassium that balances your body fluid, and Vitamin D that helps build strong bones, and iron. Here's a quick and easy (and cheap!) dish to benefit from these nutrients in the most effective way. Enjoy!

Pork & Cloud Ear Mushrooms with Oyster Sauce

MAMIIKEDA
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

INGREDIENTS

1-2 persons

- 4-5 slices pork shabu shabu
- 1/3 cup dried cloud ear mushrooms
- 2-3 eggs
- 1 tomato
- 1 clove minced garlic or 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 2 tbsp oyster sauce
- 1 tbsp cooking oil
- 1/2 tbsp sesame oil

Soak dried cloud ear mushrooms in water for 15-20 minutes. Wash thoroughly before use.

Cut pork slices into three, and tomato into 8 wedges

Heat frying pan well with cooking oil, and make fluffy scrambled egg (do not overcook!). Set it aside.

TIP: Don't be afraid to use more oil than you want! A hot frying pan with a thin layer of oil will make your scrambled egg non-fluffy and will stick to the pan!

Using the same frying pan (no need to wash; dump excess oil if necessary), stir-fry pork slices, cloud ear, and tomato wedges with the garlic of your choice.

Get your scrambled egg back into the pan. Add sesame oil around the edge of your pan, then the oyster Sauce, and stir.

TIP: Don't mix for too long! Your eggs and tomato wedges shouldn't lose their shape too much.

WHERE TO BUY

- **Dried cloud ear/black mushrooms:** Any Chinese/ Korean stores on island ($1.79-$3.00/pack)
- **Pork shabu shabu (thin slice) cuts:** In most of Chinese/ Korean stores on island ($2.00-$4.00/pack)

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mistakes women make WITH EXERCISE AND DIET

DRE DELOS SANTOS
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

My phone lit up. It was a direct message. She wanted help. She expressed her frustration with how much she had let herself go, and that she's done putting it off. It was finally time to get on board.

I've been quite vocal about the importance of keeping it simple when it comes to training and dieting. There are many ways to get to the same destination. To our own detriment, though, we seek out methods that look good on paper to make radical changes. *This* happens to be a recurring theme among women who are trying to get in shape.

As she shared her goals with me, I told her exactly what she should expect. That, ultimately, in order for her to get where she wanted to go, she had to be in it for the long haul because regardless of what she chooses to do, her ability to make it all stick is what matters.

My goal here isn't to be a nitpicker. It's to help you steer through the common faults—break it down piece by piece, and then learn how to become self-sufficient. To that end, here are some of the mistakes I see women make.

PLACING YOUR EGGS IN THE WRONG BASKET

Based on my experience, when they completely buy in, women will work harder than men. The problem is that, through the process of trying to lose weight and transform their body, they unintentionally create gaping holes.

On the nutrition front, they avoid sodium, carbohydrates, fruits, red meat, and dairy because they've been listening to Susan from accounting. Sure, you'll respond favorably at the outset, but if you're easily swayed by such misguided remarks, you're opening the door to nutrient deficiencies. Remember that the goal is to moderate, not overly restrict.

Seek out advice from established professionals, not hobbyists. Barring food intolerances, there's absolutely zero value in the complete avoidance of the aforementioned food groups.

TAKING ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

This is what typically happens when good habits are not set in place. Working your tail off the whole week does not entitle you to binge on the weekends. I'm all for being social. In fact, one day isn't going to hurt. But you're delusional if you think you can get away with it over many weeks or months. What's more, it's a horrible dietary strategy to follow.

While this applies heavily into the male »

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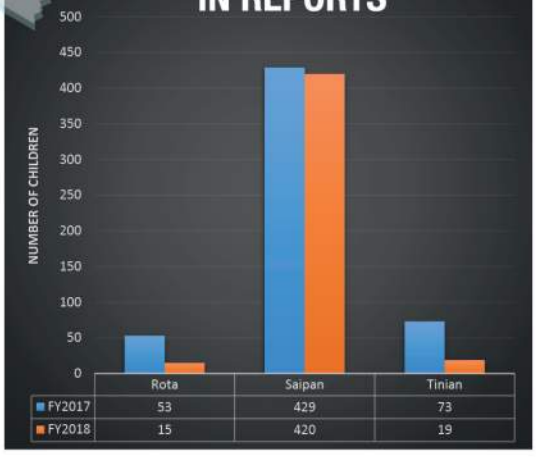
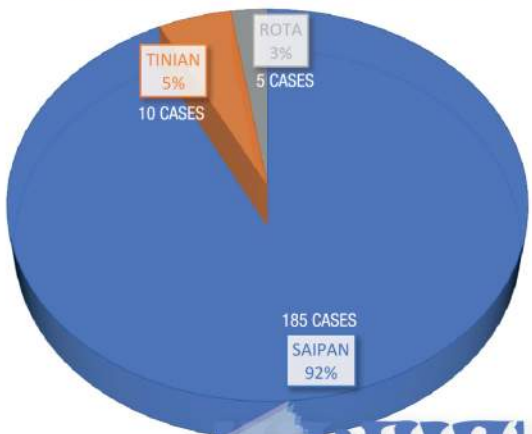


	Rota	Saipan	Tinian
FY2017	53	429	73
FY2018	15	420	19

CASES OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT IN THE CNMI



Total of 337 Allegations in the CNMI

49	Physical Abuse
45	Sexual Abuse of Minors
118	Emotional Abuse
59	Neglect
66	Others *(teen pregnancy, support services, domestic violence, drug use, attempted suicide and minor sex trafficking.)*

population as well, it doesn't hit them as hard given they have a higher allotment of indulgence. Nevertheless, it's worth repeating that exercise does not grant you a hall pass to eat poorly.

You don't have to give up the foods you love, but it shouldn't be entirely lost on you that some form of restriction is necessary.

AFRAID TO LIFT HEAVY

Provided it's not dumb, you can choose any type of training you want. However, it's important to note that your body ultimately responds to the stimulus you provide it with. I've been dismissive of it in the past, but aerobic-based training does have its merit.

Assuming your lifestyle isn't out of whack, you can see transient improvements. Here's the thing: *it* does little to nothing in shaping your body, particularly long term. Sadly, I know many who habitually do hours of mundane cardio and the like. Far be it from me to judge them, they have very little to show for it. Now when applied properly in conjunction with strength training, the odds are more in your favor.

Don't be afraid to slow down the pace of your workout, and place a premium on lifting appreciable weight.

'IT'S MY MONEY AND I NEED IT NOW'

Meaningful changes take time to manifest. You know that. And at times it'll feel like you're not progressing at all, which can be annoying. That being said, restoring confidence when progress has come to a temporary halt is like telling a child not to press the shiny red button.

To positively affect change in your appearance there will undoubtedly be a point where you have to embrace the suck to get over the hump. Of the times you had to overcome resistance, think about the great deal of patience and effort you had to put in to get through it.

I've mentioned in the past you don't have to suffer, but serious goals require a measure of discomfort. Most who get bogged down eventually quit. Fortune favors the bold.

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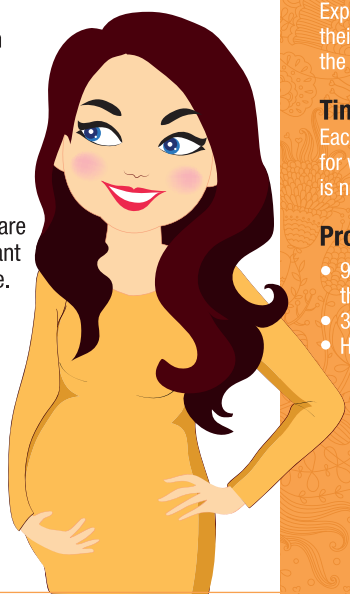

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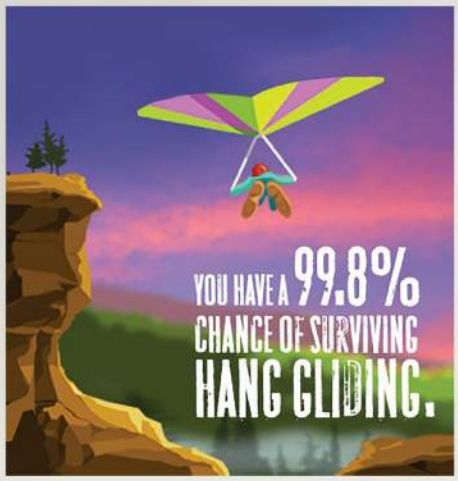

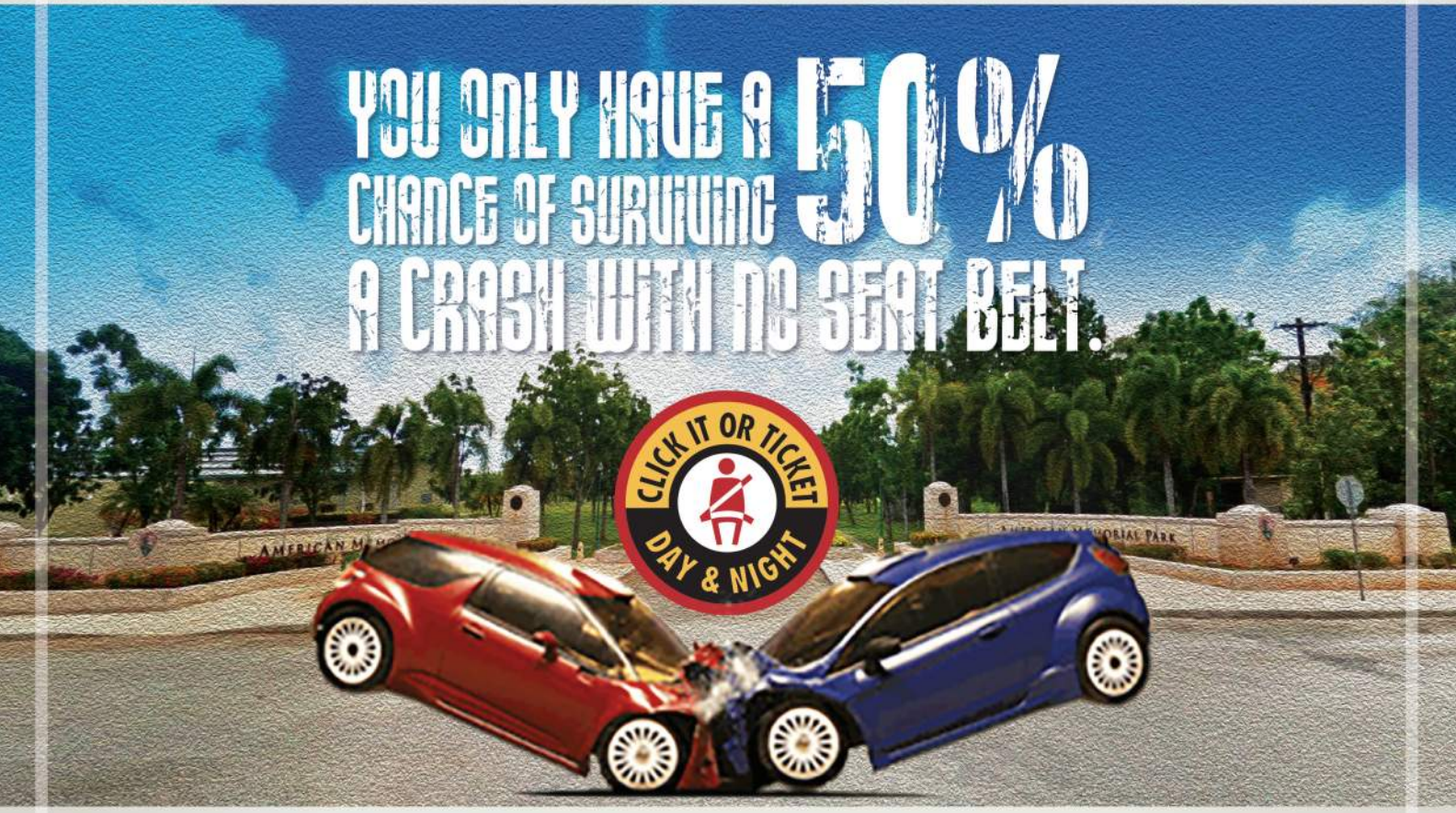

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Xenavee Pangelinan Torwal and her husband of nearly 17 years, Nathan, currently live with their two sons, George and Nathan Jr., in Boise, Idaho.

HALL OF FAME CORNER

Records are meant to be broken

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Xenavee Pangelinan Torwal didn't set out to break records when she first started swimming competitively at the tender age of 11.

In fact, the newly minted CNMI Sports Hall of Famer, told TAGA *Sports* that her main motive was to outperform her personal best times. That allowed her to travel and not be stuck at home, bored.

It's just incidental that beating her previous best times translated to nine CNMI national records and 25 age group records, not to mention 22 gold medals in the Micronesian Games and Northern Marianas Sports Association Female Athlete of the Year awards in 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000.

"When I break my own record, it just proves to me that the training I get from the Sakoviches (Saipan Swim Club coaches Bill and Jean) and Mr. Winkfield (SSC assistant coach Bobby) is paying off. That I really shouldn't be at home wasting away. The pool is where I belong. The hard work I put myself through each practice is the right way," said the now 35-year-old Torwal, who swam for the University of Kentucky varsity team in the early 2000s.

Torwal first dipped into competitive swimming when she swam for San Vicente Elementary School in the All Schools Swim Meet.

"I was a very restless child. I always wanted to be outside. I hated staying home because I was always bored," she recalls.

Her sisters didn't like going outside to play, though, and Torwal's closest neighbors were miles away. So her attention turned to after-school activities, first dabbling in cross country. That wasn't a good fit, though, as it was only once-a-year and the practices were too few and far between.

So when SVES physical education teacher Val Welch announced that he was going to start a school swim team and that practices will be three times a week after school at Koresco, Torwal jumped in at once.

> **"The pool is where I belong. The hard work I put myself through each practice is the right way."**

"I was excited for the experience. The All Schools Swim meet was my first meet. I'm not sure how I did, I just remembered I had a lot of fun and thought I'd love to do this again. That adrenaline rush, I've never experienced it before, not even at cross-country races," she said. »

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Soon, Torwal was swimming for SSC. But in her first foray off-island, an ABC swimming competition in Guam, she also got her first taste of a funny moment, when her mom went shopping for her swimming gear.

"It was from Lollipops, so that explains it. She got me a bathing suit that was more for modeling and lying around the pool and not for a swimming competition. We were not prepared for a competition; we were prepared for a vacation!"

Wardrobe mistakes aside, Torwal had stellar performances in the pool at the Guam meet and that's when she finally realized her calling as a swimmer.

"It turned out pretty good. I made times to move on to the next swim meets and this event set me up to become a swimmer. I was going to make sure I made qualifying times so I could travel. I won't be bored anymore."

Ultimately, Torwal improved by leaps and bounds under the tutelage of the Sakoviches at the Marpi pool and, by 1999, she was already part of the CNMI national swimming team bound for the South Pacific Games in Guam.

That's where the then 15-year-old achieved regional sports immortality, winning gold in record-breaking fashion in the 400m individual medley.

She remembers it like it was yesterday. Swimming in the outer lane—the lane spectators don't even check out because swimmers there usually don't place on the medal stand—Torwal said she was nervous, but also calm before the race.

"I didn't really give myself a 'you're-going-to-win' attitude. Instead, I told myself to swim my best and improve my time. I just wanted to break my own personal best time. So, the start goes off, I dive in and I feel good. I just happened to check out my butterfly split as I switched to backstroke and I saw that I was on a great pace—fastest I had ever done. Then I had to go as fast as I could in backstroke because breaststroke was coming up and that is my weakest. I wasn't able to check my backstroke split, but the transition to breaststroke was smooth and I felt my breaststroke being stronger than I had ever swam it."

All the while, Torwal could only hear Mrs. Sakovich, whom the swimmers affectionately call "Mrs.," cheering her on and all the other sounds from the venue were drowned out.

"As I made my turn to freestyle and took my first breath, I turned my head toward where Mrs. and the team were—I usually check for her to see if I need to stretch my arms out more or if my 'catch' needed to be stronger. I see her telling me to go, to kick harder and faster. I see the rest of my teammates join her and they are flailing their arms and yelling go."

Torwal thought she must be swimming pretty good and a podium finish could be in the cards.

"Maybe third place? Maybe? So, I went all out, kept my head down and just went for it. I finished strong, looked up at the time board, saw my time and got excited that I had dropped about 15-plus seconds off my PB, but it wasn't until the judge came up to me and told me to get ready for my drug testing that it hit me—I didn't just get a PB; I had gotten first place. It was exciting and, during the medal ceremony, it was announced that I had broken the [South Pacific Games] record!"

Now a mother of two, Torwal credits the Sakoviches for playing an important part in her development as a swimmer.

"Mr. Sakovich…was always so patient and calm. He was always so focused on technique. In the beginning, I had issues with the way I positioned my head in almost all strokes. For butterfly, my head came out too high when I breathed, in backstroke I moved my head too much and in freestyle I tend to drop my head too much. He would always pick up on those things and correct me. He did it with everyone."

Torwal said that training under Jean Sakovich was a completely different kettle of fish.

"Not only is technique a big part of her training but now I was going to have to do interval training, working on split times, and the distance was double that and more than what I had been doing in the beginning group. Mrs. was intense, but fun. It was preparation for those international competitions. Mr. and Mrs. were both heavy on technique. I noticed, especially when I was finally under Mrs., that every time she corrected and I use it on the next swim set, my time or split would improve. Even if it was just a second, it was still an improvement. So I started to really dig into technique, technique, technique. Whatever they saw that I needed to do, I made sure to do it," she said.

The technique-intensive training under the Sakoviches would soon pay off when she swam in the NCAA Division I program of the University of Kentucky.

"Even my coach in Kentucky was impressed that I breathed every other stroke in butterfly, that I was an alternate breather in freestyle, and my backstroke to breaststroke turn was one of the fastest he had ever seen. As basic as it sounds, those little differ-

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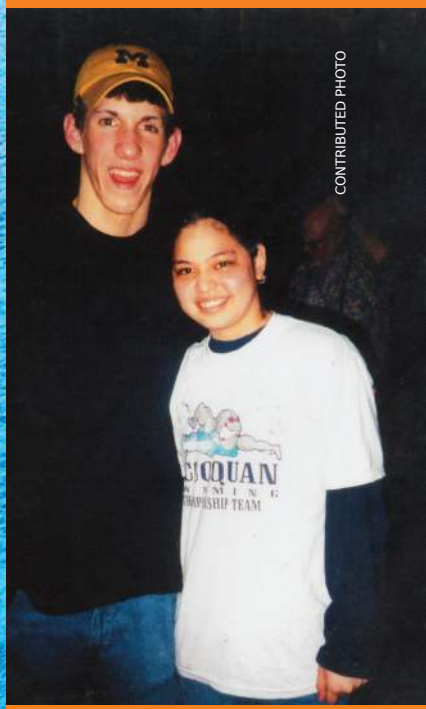
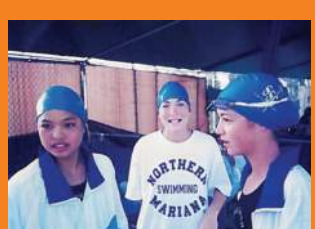


CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Xenavee Pangelinan with Olympian and record holder Michael Phelps.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

ences that got drilled into me by the Sakoviches were the reasons I got a few recruits to invite me for a tour. The Sakoviches are great at what they do and what they know."

Like her first foray into swimming, Torwal had mixed feelings when she was accepted in the swimming program of the University of Kentucky.

"When I accepted UK's offer, I was nervous. I wasn't sure what will happen. I was excited… knowing that I'd be competing with other great swimmers and training with them. I get to live with them, hang out with them, be a part of that same team. It was a lot of mixed feelings, both good and scared."

Torwal, who works at T-Mobile, and her husband of nearly 17 years, Nathan, currently live with their two sons, George and Nathan Jr., in Boise, Idaho. Nathan Sr. is no stranger to the CNMI sporting scene as he represented the Commonwealth as a wrestler at the 2002 Micronesian Games in Pohnpei.

Nowadays, Torwal's life pretty much revolves around work, being a wife, and being a doting mother to her two sons who are fully involved in sports in their own right.

Both their sons are in a year-round wrestling club in Boise and also do after-school activities like football and track and field. George, 15, also plays the trumpet and Nathan Boy, 12, plays the saxophone.

Torwal was initially lukewarm to the idea of being inducted to the Sports Hall of Fame, as she wasn't sure if she deserves it, having been away from the sport for a while.

"After hearing the ceremony that my dad recorded for me, all I can feel now is deeply honored. Because being in the Hall of Fame doesn't just shine on my accomplishments, but it also brings out the people who were part of that journey: my family, coaches, and friends. I share this award with them and I am truly honored."

Her NMSA Hall of Hame enshrinement last February has also made her think of getting back into swimming shape and exercise swimming muscles that have become dormant for years.

"My husband and I frequent the gym to stay in shape. Since the Hall of Fame announcement, I've been reminiscing about swimming and have started taking a dip at my gym's pool. I may take up master's swimming maybe in a year after I can get back into racing condition."

As for plans to visit to the CNMI, Torwal said it's been a recurring dream of hers to once again enjoy the tropical warmth and reconnect with family and friends of her home islands.

"I miss home everyday, especially during the winter season. Eleven years out here and I have yet to find something I like about snow. Well, it is pretty, but that's it. I enjoy it from the inside of my heated home. I haven't visited home since we left. I definitely plan on taking my boys to see where they were born, they were only 1 and 3 when we left."

Torwal advices aspiring swimmers to take the plunge. "It's a fun sport. You get to travel. That's what got me hooked. It is also a great stress reliever. I love the practices after school. Even though I was tired, jumping into the water and just doing the warm up workout always relaxed me." TS

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

H.O.M.E.
VISITING PROGRAM

(Healthy Outcomes for Maternal and Early Childhood)

What is the H.O.M.E. Visiting Program?

The H.O.M.E. Visiting Program is a free, voluntary, in-home service that can support you through the joys and challenges of pregnancy and parenting. The H.O.M.E. Visiting Program supports moms, dads, care-givers, and their families through a range of weekly to quarterly home visits with an assigned Family Partner Advocate (FPA).

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- Developmental screening and activities
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- Continuing Your Education
- Community resources your family may benefit from

For more information, please call (670)664-8702
or via email at hvpcnmi@gmail.com

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The project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number X02MC28239, Affordable Care Act (ACA) Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program grant.

A Disease Anywhere is

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1. There are measles outbreak occurring in countries with links to the CNMI particularly large outbreaks in the United States (Washington, Oregon, California, Texas, Colorado, etc.), Philippines, Japan, Korea, and China.
2. As of February 17, in the Philippines there have been over 8400 people infected with measles and 136 deaths – mostly children.
3. MMR vaccine recommended for those traveling internationally, especially to a country with an active measles outbreak. Vaccines take time to build immunity so travellers should get vaccinated at least 28 days prior to departure or as soon as possible.
4. Adults born on or after 1957 are also encouraged to get vaccinated. Adults with chronic conditions, such as diabetes, are at greater risk of complications from infection and even death if not properly immunized.

DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH
CNMI IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM

For more information, please call the Division of CHCC Public Health Clinics at 670-236-8745 / 8708 / 8783.
On Rota, please call 670-532-9457.
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a Threat Everywhere

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5 Please ensure that your child is up to date with age appropriate immunizations (1st dose at 12 months, second dose at 4 years old). Children under 12 months of age cannot be vaccinated with MMR and therefore rely on the rest of us to be vaccinated and protected so we don't make them sick.

6 MMR vaccine is available at your local Public Health Immunization Clinic on Saipan, Rota, and Tinian,

7 The MMR vaccine is safe and effective and will protect you and your child against measles, mumps, and rubella.

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Hooked on an adventure

BEA CABRERA
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

From left Vicky Benavente, daughter Diana, and husband Diego hold up a yellow fin tuna caught off the waters of Saipan.

On weekdays, you will find Vicky Benavente wearing her Labor secretary hat—all stiff and formal behind her desk at the CNMI Department of Labor.

Then the weekend comes along and out goes her work hat and in comes a literal hat that she wears as she plies the high seas from sun up to sundown, busily engaged in her favorite sport, trolling fishing.

For those not in the know, trolling fishing is not your typical rod-and-reel affair. Rather, it's a kind of fishing where you use two or more fishing lines with lures or baits placed at the end of the boat and drawn in the water—much like that scene in *Jaws* where chum is dragged behind the boat to catch the shark.

The kinds of fish that Benavente catches, however, are the edible kind—marlin, mahi-mahi, wahoo and yellow fin tuna—the types of fish that are teeming in CNMI waters.

"The mentality when we go out is we 'try' to catch because, aside from skills, luck plays an important part in this sport. One can actually say I am 'hooked' literally and figuratively about fishing," she said.

The kind of work that Benavente does comes with a lot of stress and sometimes makes her impatient, so going fishing and being surrounded by the ocean the whole day is her reprieve, a chance to forget the minutiae of work and its many issues and problems.

"Sometimes I am out there thinking about the fishing and, suddenly, a work idea comes to mind and say, 'hey that might work!" she adds.

Benavente's interest in fishing started out of curiosity as she and her husband, former lieutenant governor Diego Benavente, used to manage a fish market for 20 years.

"During that time, I was watching our fishermen go out and bring fish in at the end of the day. I thought, 'Ooh, that looks easy.' It was 1988 when I got on a boat and went fishing. I realized that it is hard work! It's hard on the body and hard on the engine of your boat. …There is really a lot into it than just going out and throwing a line," she said.

Citing her own experience, Benavente said that fishing is an effective gender equalizer. "Others don't treat me any different[ly]. I'm not given any slack or special treatment. I help clean, set up, bring things to the boat, unload and, even if the waters are rough, they don't treat me like a baby. I am used to getting my gear on and be safe…everyone has their task."

Despite the mental and physical challenges that come with trolling fishing, Benavente. encouraged her children to give it a try. In fact, all her children learned how to swim when they were babies and they all love to get on the boat and go fishing with Diego and Vicky.

"We've been very blessed [in] that, every time they come with us, we catch fish and now, as adults, they are still at it," she said.

Benavente said that teaching her children the importance of the ocean that surround the Commonwealth has heightened their awareness not to litter and to take care of the waters—to be a part of the solution rather than the problem.

"Part of the joy in fishing is being able to provide for our family. This hobby allows us to share our catch with family and friends and, sometimes, the goal when we go out there is to share the catch for family functions and events like rosaries, weddings, and, sadly, even for funerals. So aside from the excitement, this is why I keep going back out to the ocean," she said.

Over the years, Benavente and her team have won fishing tournaments on Saipan, Tinian and Rota. "One of the goals this year is to win a tournament in Guam to be able to achieve a 'grand slam' of tournaments in the Marianas."

"Currently we are preparing for the Saipan

CNMI Labor Secretary Vicky Benavente at her office on Capital Hill. "Trolling fishing is my reprieve. After being out there, I go back to work feeling refreshed."

BEA CABRERA

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Diego and Vicky Benavente won the 2004 Palau Derby with their blue marlin catch.

International Fishing Tournament happening on July 20-21 of this year," she added.

Of course, it is also a dream to try competitions in other parts of the nation like Florida.

It is Benavente's hope that she will continue to fish for the next 10 to 15 years. Though it may look leisurely on social media, trolling fishing is physically tough—you must have a keen sense of balance, with feet planted on the boat and your hands have to be able to hold on during rough waters, plus the strength to pull in the lines.

"I would like to fish for as long as I can… I would also like to see more women joining this sport," she said.

In the last 35 years of the Saipan International Fishing Tournament, Benavente said that she has seen less than 5 women register.

"If more women were fishing, we'd have more families that have close ties and having more fun together. Fishing is something you can do with your family and I think we would have more confident children because they'd learn to swim and hone their skills in the water.

"Women are natural nurturers and, if more women are fishing, the earth will be better taken cared of, as more events and education outreach on how to protect our ocean will be organized."

COVER STORY

Of trials and triathlons

Both worlds are tough but lawyers and weekend triathletes Robby Glass and Janet King are loving the ride.

"I enjoy the challenge that triathlons have to offer. Completing any of the three portions of a triathlon is an accomplishment anyone should be proud of but putting the three together creates a unique endurance challenge that allows you to really push yourself to find out what you are capable of achieving," said Glass, who debuted in last month's Tagaman Triathlon.

King is a Tagaman regular and loves juggling her time doing races and attending trials, while also keeping up with her maternal duties. She is mom to Samuel Manglona, 4, and Kate Manglona, 8.

"I once read that a triathlete is 'a person who doesn't understand that one sport is hard enough.' Humor aside, a triathlon is hard. Training is hard. Commitment is hard. This is the way I see it. I am a mother, a lawyer, a lover of sports. I would not give up any of these to focus on just one thing. Life is a balance of staying positive, working hard, enjoying the journey, and embracing all the possibilities," King said.

Like most weekend warriors, King and Glass do triathlon on weekends and spend their weekdays in their offices or courts to get ready for cases or work in trials. Preparation is crucial to make it to the finish line and complete a trial.

Glass has a pre-race regimen that he wryly describes as "corny": He wakes up early, turns on his race-day playlist on his iPod, which always starts with *Eye of the Tiger*, takes a quick shower to help wake him up, and then double-check that he has everything he needs for race-day.

For the office, he says his regimen is based on his job as a lawyer for the Office of the Attorney General—to seek justice.

King cites sleep and nutrition as essential, right alongside preparedness, before a race or a trial.

"I have butterflies in my stomach right before a race and what to eat is just as important as making sure you have prepared everything else. My ritual pre-race meal that has served me for years is a banana, plain pasta, and black coffee. I find it easy to prepare whether the race is at home or if I am on the road in a hotel room," the former Tinian resident said.

Of the three disciplines involved in triathlon, King fins swimming to be the most challenging as it is outside her comfort zone. In fact, she fears that leg of the race as it is too close to the experience of drowning.

"It is the most excruciating part of the race where my fears are the greatest. I question why I am doing the event, I doubt my abilities. I actually feel like I am drowning, and I think that my body is not yet ready to race. Facing this each time I swim is mentally tough and I am always one second away from giving up."

The only way King deals with her fears is to rise above them—to push through the negative chatter in her thoughts and just go for it.

Glass finds similar intimidation in the swim leg of triathlon. »

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

KRISTIN BERRY WITH LAUREN BENSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Robby Glass and Janet King jog along the shores of Micro Beach on Saipan.

Janet King is a Tagaman regular and also does other races.

KRISTIN BERRY WITH LAUREN BENSON PHOTOGRAPHY

"It's definitely the most technical part of any triathlon. From proper swimming strokes to breathing patterns, it's not something I have adapted to easily. Like many things in life, you get better the more you do something, so I just tried to swim as often as I could. I would swim the tanks during my lunch break (which is awesome cause there's so much to see). I would do practice sessions on the weekends. I would even practice breathing techniques while sitting at home watching TV," the Texas native said.

Approaching a race and trial has their similarities and differences, but both give Glass and King feeling of fulfillment when they finish them.

"The most notable similarity between triathlons and being an attorney is breaking things down into smaller parts. On a case, I break things down into how I would prove each element necessary to win my case. For triathlons, I break things down into the three parts, and then from there I break it into smaller more manageable parts. If I have to run 10 miles, I think about it one mile at a time. My running mantra is 'just one more.' One more step. One more water station. One more mile. Eventually it's just one more finish line," Glass said.

"In a world of hyperbole, I still can't overstate how great it feels to finish an endurance race of any kind. Triathlons triple that feeling. As each stage winds down, the overwhelming feeling of accomplishing your goal grows. For cases, there is still the feeling of accomplishment as each case you complete as a lawyer helps you grow both as an attorney and as a human being, but as a public servant, it's definitely a different kind of feeling than finishing up a race," he added.

King considers the struggles before reaching the finish line or ending a trial a character test.

"All involve discovering who you are and challenging yourself to become better. And the best part of the triathlon is crossing the finish line. At that point, everything hurts but, at the finish line, I know my family is there, and I forget all about the pain when I see them. After a race or a trial, I feel great, and inevitably, I am thinking of the next one," she said.

Despite the tough loving she gets from triathlon, King has no plans to stop, at least for now. "I think I am going to enjoy doing triathlons for as long as I can. I would also love to do more adventure sports in places abroad with my kids as they grow older," said the mother of two.

There's no stopping Glass, too, from racing in triathlons and doing other sports. But this adventure into marathons and swimming and running could also include a side trip into the realm of theater. "I almost skipped law school and moved to L.A. to pursue acting. My undergraduate degree in is theatre and I've always enjoyed acting. So if I wasn't a lawyer, I'd probably be an actor," he said.

KRISTIN BERRY WITH LAUREN BENSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Lawyer Robby Glass debuted in last month's Tagaman Triathlon.

Robbie Schorr carves out his own niche

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Robbie Schorr poses for a photo after getting the 2018 Tan Siu Lin Foundation/Northern Marianas Sports Association Male Student Athlete of the Year award last February.

Jeff Schorr, the former Department of the Interior rep in the CNMI, is a self-deprecating chap.

But you can also immediately sense his boundless pride in his son, Robbie. He fondly observes that never in his lengthy years of stay in the CNMI has he gotten as much media coverage as what Robbie is getting these days as a tennis prodigy.

It began nine years ago when Robbie decided to try a new sport.

"Tennis was actually the second sport I tried, soccer being the first (he played soccer when he was 6). I started playing tennis when I was 8 years old because I wanted to try a new sport."

It was love in an instant. He first trained under the aegis of former Davis Cup captain and CNMI Sports Hall of Famer Jeff Race.

"Everything was very new and unusual to me, but I still enjoyed every moment of it."

Soon, he was joining local tournaments and was an extremely promising player despite being a newbie.

"The first two tournaments I played were local mini-tennis tournaments that I both won. I still remember it today and it will always be in my memory," the Saipan International School student said.

The son of Jeff and Hannah graduated from mini-tournaments to the competitive ones and even played in divisions for players twice or even three times his age. From local competitions, he jumped to regional and international events, proudly wearing the colors of the CNMI and Pacific Oceania and having his share of victories, too.

The recent, and probably the most memorable one, was the boys U16 title he earned at the 2018 Pacific Oceania Junior Championships in Fiji.

"It was my last time playing in POJC and I was able to win the boys U16 championship," said Schorr, who also took the boys U14 crown in the same competition, giving him the top ranking in the entire Pacific and was a semifinalist when he debuted in the POJC via the U12 tournament.

"There were two players that I consider my rivals: Clement Mainguy from Vanuatu and Jeremy Guines from Tahiti. They were the biggest competition in that tournament and it felt really good to compete with and against them in important matches," said Schorr, who lost to the two players in previous years before pulling off an upset over Mainguy in the 2018 finale.

Last year's triumph in POJC got Schorr another top ranking in the Pacific (made up of 22 nations) and this impressive performance also earned him the coveted Tan Siu Lin Foundation/Northern Marianas Sports Association Male Student Athlete of the Year award. It was his third Student Athlete the Year recognition—the most by any awardee in that category. Schorr took the same award in 2014 and 2016.

Challenges along the way

Now the CNMI No. 1 junior tennis player, Schorr's journey wasn't without its share of pitfalls. Among those stumbling blocks were close game losses, long travel times for competitions, catching up with schoolwork after going off-island, attending regular practices after school, and grinding through matches against heavily favored opponents and partisan crowd.

"I try to render out all outside distractions and just focus on working hard, competing, striving to win, and fighting until the end. I do my best to not be distracted by the crowd but it feels good to know they are watching and/or supporting me," the former Pacific Oceania Junior Davis Cup Team member said.

Despite these challenges, there was never a time Schorr thought of quitting. Nine years after picking up a racquet, the now 17-year-old is still training under Race. Not even Super Typhoon Yutu managed to prevent the CNMI junior player from hitting the walls of the American Memorial Park just days after the Category 5 storm flattened the islands.

"It was tough to manage all important aspects of daily life, but I persevered through them and I'm proud that I did. …It's just time and dedication to playing as much as you can. There was never a point when I wanted to stop.… because I love playing sports and nothing will ever come between me and my passion for it," he said.

Now that he is done with POJC, he hopes to have a chance to compete in Association of Tennis Professionals events where his idol, Rafael Nadal, plays.

"My favorite player and role model is Rafael Nadal because of how respectable he is, how he fights for every single ball, never gives up, and always accepts the results," Schorr said.

“It was tough to manage all important aspects of daily life, but I persevered through them and I’m proud that I did. ...It’s just time and dedication to playing as much as you can. There was never a point when I wanted to stop.... because I love playing sports and nothing will ever come between me and my passion for it.”

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Robbie Schorr goes for a backhand return to his long-time coach Jeff Race during their semis match in the 2019 White Coconut Tennis Classic at the American Memorial Park courts.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

“Running makes me feel good. Although it may feel hard during races when your lungs are about to explode and your legs feel super heavy, the feeling after the races/runs is what I look forward to. People never believe me when I say running is addicting. It makes me feel good and it’s really true.”

Tania Tan runs in the 5,000m race during the Oceania Micronesian Regional Championships 2018 at the Oleai Sports Complex.

from reluctant runner to winner

ROSELYNMONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Saipan Marathon, Turkey Trot Run, All Schools Cross Country and Track and Field Championships, and a bunch of middle-distance events—name it and guaranteed, Tania Tan has done these races.

She won in them, too, making her a perennial contender in local running competitions in the last two years.

Her success in running is quite an unexpected turn, considering that she actually had second thoughts about joining Saipan International School's cross-country team.

"I got into running about two and a half years ago (during my sophomore year) when Mr. Ron Snyder (SIS headmaster) asked me to join the cross-country team," said Tan.

"At first I was reluctant but, I thought, why not give it a shot? So I joined and loved it from then. I began to win competitions during cross-country season and track season in my sophomore year (as well as a few local races like the Turkey Trot), so it made me realize that I had potential in running, which made me focus on it more."

In last year's cross-country season, she won two of the first three legs (she missed the first one, as she had to represent the CNMI in the Oceania Cross-Country Championships in Australia) and eventually took the championship, besting a throng of Agape Christian School students and the equally competitive runners from SIS and Marianas High School.

Tan also suited up for the CNMI National Team that participated in the Oceania Micronesian Regional Champions on Saipan, winning the gold medals in both the 3,000-meter and 5,000-meter runs. A few months later, she responded to another call for national team duty when she joined her fellow SIS runners and students from MHS and Agape in joining in the 2018 Asia Pacific Invitational Cross- Country Championships in Guam. The girls team finished third overall in the race that featured high school students from Guam, Japan, the Philippines, and Hong Kong, while Tan made it to the All-Island Team—the first runner from the CNMI.

Back in local events, she proved that she is not only for road races, but also up to the challenging trek to the highest peak on Saipan when she joined the Mt. Tapochao Turkey Trot Run. She won her division for the third straight year.

All these victories in local and regional races made her the hands-down winner of the 2018 Tan Siu Lin Foundation/Northern Mariana Sports Association Female Student Athlete of the Year award—a recognition that's special because she got it before she leaves for college (the annual award is only for elementary, middle, and high school students).

Run, run, and run some more

Tan wishes to keep running even after she leaves the island.

"I hope to continue to run when I get to college (not sure where yet!), and hopefully be able to join the cross-country team. I know it's tough to get into a college team, but I hope my passion and hard work for running will be able to get me in," the SIS senior said.

The 17-year-old is such a determined runner that she usually spends her afterschool time along Beach Road to log more miles.

"Running after school is tough, because usually I am already stressed from school (especially if I have tests that day) and it's very hot. I also don't get that much sleep at night, due to homework and tests I have to study for. However, I push myself to run because I want to improve," she said.

"Running makes me feel good. Although it may feel hard during races when your lungs are about to explode and your legs feel super heavy, the feeling after the races/runs is what I look forward to. People never believe me when I say running is addicting. It makes me feel good and it's really true," Tan added.

Though she is determined to finish every race, there were also times when she wanted to quit.

"When I was running the half marathon last year, I wanted to quit. I didn't even hit the 15-kilometer mark but my legs and knees were in pain. I wanted to give up, but people along the way kept cheering for me and when I reached the halfway mark, someone told me I was the second female runner so I told myself to keep going and pushing, that this was the race that I've been training for months so I pushed myself and finished strong," Tan said.

Sports kind of gal

Besides running, Tania plays tennis too, tried soccer once, swam in previous school meets, and recently picked up triathlon.

"The first sport I tried was soccer. My dad was into soccer and my mom got involved too, so they made me try it out. If there's any other sport I wish I could do, it would be surfing. I have always loved the ocean and surfing seems fun," the National Honor Society member said.

"I saw myself being active in sports, because I used to play the violin and I remember my teacher would always get mad at me for not practicing because I was always so focused on tennis. From then on, I knew that I would be more of a sports type of gal," Tan said.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Tania Tan proudly shows the 2018 Tan Siu Lin Foundation/Northern Marianas Sports Association Female Student Athlete of the Year award she received last February.

It was easier for her to try her hand at so many sports because she was never pressured to win. It was all about giving it her all and having fun in the process. In the end, winning wasn't the goal.

"My parents (Jerry and Lydia) never pressured me when I was younger and, even now, they constantly tell me to just do my best and have fun, no matter what the outcome is."

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

John Sablan, third from left, celebrates with his Ulloa Team.

John M. Sablan

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

John Maratita Sablan was already a leader long before he attained the rank of captain with the CNMI Division of Customs.

The 2018 Government Employee of the Year was one of the mainstays of the San Antonio Sixers teams in the early 2000s and played point guard for the Ulloa Team that copped the 22-and-under championship more than a decade ago.

Married to Jocelyn Alvarez Sablan and with five beautiful children—Angelyce, Kadence, Ethan, Alexandria, and Adina—the now 36-year-old Sablan still calls San Antonio Village his home.

A member of the CNMI men's national basketball team to the 2006 Saipan Micronesian Games, the 5'9" Sablan got his first taste of basketball at a very young age.

"Growing up in San Antonio, it's almost natural to be around basketball. We didn't have any other sporting outlet. The basketball court in San Antonio was always the place to be. It was where the village got together. The basketball court was all we had," Sablan told TAGA *Sports*.

It also helped that Sablan's family has always been into the sport.

"I recall begging my cousin Peter if I could follow him to the basketball court. I also recall watching my uncles playing in the front yard of Auntie Ancha's house. As soon as they finished playing, my cousins and I were on the court trying to imitate their moves," he said, adding that his first ever coach was a certain Mr. Bob, who managed the Sheridan Park in Hawaii.

Of all the basketball games he has ever played, two are seared in his mind: winning the 22-and-under title and wearing the CNMI colors in the 2006 Micro Games.

"Winning the 22-and-under champion-

“Sports contributed in many ways—punctuality, preparation, and commitment. I’ve always been passionate about sports. I take that same passion with me to work daily. The passion to learn, teach, and evolve. I was fortunate to be a part of championship winning teams in the sport of basketball.”

ship with Team Ulloa was really special to me. That team was predominantly [composed] of my family members. It was also a treat to see my late grandmother Maria and grand-aunt Ancha attend our games,” he said.

As for his being a part of the 2006 Micronesian Games: “To be the host country and play in front of the home crowd was such an experience. Representing the CNMI was such a great honor.”

The son of Rep. Janet Ulloa Maratita and the late Henry Skilang Sablan said his mother is his biggest influence—not only in basketball but also in life. “She wasn’t always able to make it to my games but she’s my biggest supporter.”

Among NBA players, he idolized Allen Iverson of the Philadelphia 76ers. “I was inspired by his playing style. He was small in stature but he had a loud game.”

Among his peers, his favorite teammates were Henry Sablan on his Sixers team, his brother Josh and cousins Gus and Cedric on his Ulloa team, and Kelvin Fitial on his Hoopaholics team. “When we needed a bucket, a rebound, a steal, these guys come to mind.”

On the opposite side of the court, Sablan referred to the 1990s and early 2000s Ol’Aces as teams always deserving of his respect. “It was always a battle. Every game against them was intense.”

Fast-forward to 2018 when Sablan received his Government Employee of the Year award and he credits basketball for helping him become the man he is today.

“Sports contributed in many ways—punctuality, preparation, and commitment. I’ve always been passionate about sports. I take that same passion with me to work daily. The passion to learn, teach, and evolve. I was fortunate to be a part of championship winning teams in the sport of basketball.”

In turn, he credits his “teammates” at the Special Enforcement Branch at Customs and the CNMI Drug Enforcement Task Force for helping him win the 2018 Employee of the Year award.

Sablan said lessons learned from participating in sports at a young age has helped him in ways that, in retrospect, may have seemed so mundane but has positively impacted his life and career in many ways.

“I think the most important lesson I can take away from playing sports is team above self. I was always a team player, always tried to get everyone involved in the game. I take that same mentality to my personal and professional life.”

He also drew parallels from playing point guard for his Sixers team in the past to now serving as captain of Customs’ Special Enforcement Branch.

“Playing point guard, I became the floor general. Taking plays from the coach on the sidelines and executing them on the court. I do the same as a captain. I get information from my higher-ups and disseminate that information to the 20 officers under my supervision. The common similarities in playing point guard and supervising is ‘facilitating.’”

Sablan said it’s been years since he suited up for a basketball league and his future basketball plans now involve coaching the next generation of players.

“I haven’t played basketball competitively in years. My goal is to start coaching. My plan is to get involved at the youth level. Help develop young players fundamentally and hopefully start a basketball program.”

He also plans to take care of his health more and is fortunate to have friends willing to help him get back into shape.

“I’m blessed with having two best friends as personal trainers, Jerry Diaz and James Lee. I try to stay in shape by working out with Jerry and the BBJ Athletics crew in the morning. Jerry and James have been motivating me for the past few years to get back on the court and start living healthy,” he said. TS

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Capt. John Sablan poses with his family during a recent promotion ceremony.

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John Sablan, left, with his growing family.

FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT FOR RODRIGO ADA

JONPEREZ
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Rodrigo Ada is relatively a newcomer in the sport of weightlifting, but the 27-year-old has shown promise in one of the medal-rich events in any international tournament—whether it be the Olympic Games or world championships. He made an extraordinary debut at the 2018 Micronesian Games in Yap, adding to the 15-medal haul of the five-person CNMI weightlifting squad.

Ada, a Northern Marianas College graduate with a degree in business management that he earned in 2017, has been training sporadically for about four years before the Micro Games because of the need to balance his work and studies. Ada works as a teacher aide at the William S. Reyes Elementary School.

He trained full time after finishing college—a year before the Yap Micro Games.

"After graduating college, that's the time when I had more time to focus on my training. Before the Micro Games, I was training with coach Jerry Diaz and the BBJ athletics team. Before the competition, I was able to train with my fellow weightlifters: Angel [San Nicolas], Joey [Tudela], Bonny [Cruz], and Antonette [Labausa].

The ninth edition of the Micro Games was his first major competition, where he won two silver medals and one bronze in the men's 94-kg weight category and missed out another second-place finish in the snatch by 6-kgs to Dorian Peter of Pohnpei. Sione Halo of the Marshall Islands won the gold with a lift of 95 kg.

"The Micro Games was a nerve-racking experience, not knowing what to expect, especially knowing the fact that there were other hardworking individuals who were even stronger than I was that I would be facing in the competition," said Ada in an interview with TAGA Sports.

Yet he performed so well that the 27-yeard-old was later named the Northern Marianas Sports Association Male Athlete of the Year at the 2018 NMSA Tan Siu Lin Foundation Annual Sports Banquet at the Hibiscus Hall of the Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan. It was the second time a weightlifter was named a NMSA top athlete after San Nicolas last year.

He and female lifter Labausa, who scooped up three golds in the women's 90 kg in the Micro Games, were named the NMSA Male and Female Athletes of the Month for July to earn their spots for the annual award.

Ada was actually surprised when they called out his name as the top male athlete of the CNMI. "I was honored. …After the long hours in the gym, working hard, and perfecting my craft, I am extremely proud and ecstatic with the final outcome," said Ada. "After being named NMSA Male Athlete of the Year I can finally say that anything is possible and I have the confidence to achieve whatever I put my mind to. I certainly did not expect it, but I am glad to be in the state I am in now."

Watching videos of weightlifting competitions on YouTube ignited the flames of Ada's interest in the sport. Also, he finds the sport of weightlifting fun. "I's a sport I enjoy and feel passionate about."

"Ray Santos was my go-to guy in the beginning and, in a few months down the line, so was Angel. They [Santos and San Nicolas] taught me the basics, and proper form on how to weightlift. It was a very generous gesture for them to take the time to teach while, at the same time, training me."

Right now, he is trying to get back to his former weight of 170 lbs as he continues to train with the BBJ Athletics Team. "From there, we'll see on what kind of course I would take and where it would lead me."

"My routine is 5am training with the BBJ Athletics Crew before going into my weightlifting. I do my best to train from Monday to Friday and keep the weekend as my time to rest and be with family." TS

Rodrigo Ada is relatively a newcomer in the sport of weightlifting but the 27-year-old is showing bright promise.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Good players inspire themselves
Great players inspire others

The Tan Siu Lin Foundation congratulates these four outstanding athletes. We wish you more success in the future and may you continue to inspire others through your hard work and dedication to your sports.

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